RAJYA SABHA

Thursday, the 4th August, 1988/13th Sravana, 1910 (Saka)

The House met at eleven of the clock, **Mr. Chairman** in the Chair.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Water sharing agreement with Bangladesh

*121. SHRI CHITTA BASU: Will the Minister of WATER RESOURCES be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that no bilateral discussions between the Governments of India and Bangladesh took place after November, 1987 for a fresh agreement on the sharing of Ganga waters;

(b) if so, what steps Government propose to take to augment the flow of water in the Ganga during the lean months to ensure the survival of the Calcutta Port;

(c) whether Government have undertaken the survey work for a link canal through Indian territories to connect the Brahmaputra, the Teesta and the Mahananda; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF LAW AND JUSTICE AND THE MINISTER OF WATER RESOURCES (SHRI B. SHANKARANAND): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The Feeder Canal of the Farakka Barrage Project is designed to meet the requirements of Calcutta Port. The augmentation issue continues to be on the agenda of the Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission.

(c) and (d) Only some preliminary survey work was started in 1987.

SHRI CHITTA BASU: Sir, it is a very important question for the survival of Calcutta Port and other river systems in West Bengal. As you know, the agreement on the sharing of Ganga waters between Bangladesh and India expired on December, 31 1985. Bilateral discussions were started. But as far as I know, the last meeting between the representatives of the Governments of Bangladesh and India on this subject was held only in November, 1985 and after that there has been no meeting. Sir, as you know, Hooghly requires at least 30,000 cusecs of water during the lean months. But the last year's experience shows us that only 10,000 cusecs of water was available for the river Hooghly during the lean months resulting in heavy siltation on the bed of the river Hooghly and a very large reduction of navigability of the river which threatens the very survival of the Calcutta Port. We are told that Bangladesh sought to internationalise the issue. As a matter of fact, they succeeded in trying to trilateralise the issue by including Nepal into the dispute. It is reported that in the last meeting Nepal has refused to get herself involved in it saying that it is primarily a bilateral matter between India and Bangladesh. So, there is a stalemate over the issue. Now, the hon. Minister, in the course of his reply, says that the augmentation issue is still on the agenda. Having landed ourselves in such a stalemate condition, I want to know from the hon. Minister how the Government of India now proposes to proceed with the matter.

MR. CHAIRMAN: By negotiations.

SHRI B. SHANKARANAND: Sir, I very much share the concern of the hon. Member with regard to the navigability of the Calcutta Port and we will do all that we can to feed the Calcutta Port with the water that is necessary. The hon. Member raised other matters, such as the involvement of Nepal. Perhaps, Sir, I should say that these are matters which are still under the consideration of the Government.

SHRI CHITTA BASU: What is this reply, Sir? It is in a stalemate now. So, my question was this:

How does the Government propose to proceed further?

MR. CHAIRMAN: You know that two nations are involved and there is no other way but to negotiate. It can be by persuasion, negotiation and all that.

SHRI CHITTA BASU: Sir, we have to watch the death of Calcutta port? ...(*Interruptions*)...

MR. CHAIRMAN: You persuade President Ershad . . ..(*Interruptions*) . . .

SHRI SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY: Persuade Madam Zia...(*Interruptions*)...

SHRI B. SHANKARANAND: Sir, may I say this that we share the views regarding the augmentation of water at Farakka and the reason for augmentation is, no doubt, that Bangladesh is insisting? There have been agreements between India and Bangladesh and we have been releasing water to Bangladesh. It is true that there has not been any meeting although the agreement came to an end and these matters are decided only by negotiations.

SHRI CHITTA BASU: I am putting my second supplementary, Sir. Now, Nepal also has suggested that much of the Ganga water is being taken away in the upper part of the Ganga basin by way of constructing dams and diverting the water and our Government also proposed some time earlier that there should be a link canal between the Brahmaputra and the Ganga and that has also been objected to by the Government of Bangladesh. Now there is a proposal that there should be a canal connecting the Brahmaputra, Teesta and the Mahananda. And, Sir, the honourable Minister has rather replied that only some preliminary survey work was started in 1987. My straight question to the honourable Minister is this: Now that Nepal has disassociated itself from it, now that Bangladesh has already taken the position of not accepting the Government of India's proposal to have a link canal through the Bangladesh territory and now that the only way which remains is to have a link canal connecting the Brahmaputra, Teesta and the Mahananda with the Ganga, will the Government seriously take up this matter? I am asking this question because I have got great doubts and I feel that they are not very serious about the matter since they simply say that only some preliminary survey work was started in 1987. Will the Government now assure this House that this project will be taken up with all seriousness so that the augmentation of water to the Hooghly river can be ensured for the survival of the Calcutta port and for the survival of the entire North-eastern and Eastern Regions of the country?

SHRI B. SHANKARANAND: Sir, we will do everything that we can... (*Interruptions*)...for the survival of the Calcutta port. But, Sir, regarding the link canal through the Indian territory or through Bangladesh, these are matters to be discussed with Bangladesh and I do not want to give any details about it.

SHRI RAJIV GANDHI: Sir may I add a little bit?

SHRI SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY: You are also thinking?

SHRI RAJIV GANDHI: Yes; more than you.

SHRI SURESH KALMADI: But he is not thinking at all!

SHRI RAJIV GANDHI: Sir, we have been having temporary arrangements with Bangladesh over this water for a very long time now. We have on a number of occasions, even before I became the Prime Minister and on many occasions since I became the Prime Minister, taken up this matter with Bangladesh at the highest level. I myself have spoken about it and we were given certain assurances at every level including

the highest level that they will sit down and talk with us to come to some sort of a permanent solution for this problem. But we find that Bangladesh does not seem to be really interested in coming to a permanent solution because they find that a temporary solution is perhaps more convenient. I have given instructions that we should take a very tough line and we should look very hard at the whole thing before we extend the temporary thing as it is today. Thank you, Sir.

SHRI CHITTA BASU: Now, are you taking some other steps to find out a permanent solution of the problem?

SHRI RAJIV GANDHI: If the hon. Member goes through what I have said, carefully, the answer to his question is there.

SHRIMATI BIJOYA CHAKRAVARTY: Sir, I want to know whether in the discussions with Bangaladesh, Brahmaputra is included or not. Second, I also want to know whether in this process the Government wants to abandon the proposed hydel power project that is included in the Brahmaputra... (*Interruption*)

SHRI B. SHANKARANAND: I need notice for this question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: He is not in charge of hydel projects.

SHRI DIPEN GHOSH: It will depend upon the water from Bangladesh.

SHRI VISHVJIT P. SINGH: The question is whether the Brahmaputra river is included in this. And in the negotiations that you are having whether the sharing of the Brahmaputra river...

SHRI B. SHANKARANAND: It has nothing to do with the sharing of the Brahmaputra river. It has reference to the sharing of the Ganga augmented at the Farakka barrage.

SHRI GURUDAS DAS GUPTA: Sir, I am grateful to the Prime Minister for his categorical statement that they will be trying to bring sense to the Bangladesh Government to solve this problem. (*Interruptions*). But that is our interpretation. The Prime Minister said that the Government has asked its representative to take a tough line. I agree with it. But the point is that whatever may be the toughness of the Government line the agreeing of Bangladesh to our proposal does not wholly depend on us. They must agree to it, whether we take a tough line or a soft line. Therefore, sir, their agreeing to it is very important. Supposing, Sir, Bangladesh does not agree to it, then what do we do?

MR. CHAIRMAN: What is your suggestion?

SHRI GURUDAS DAS GUPTA: I am telling. The whole problem of watrer for the Ganges involves the economy of Bengal—not only of Bengal but Eastern India. Government has another alternative. Another alternative is to build up, as has been stated, a canal within the Indian territory through Mahanadi, Brahmaputra, the Ganges and Teesta. It is not dependent on the agreement with Bangladesh. Therefore, part (a) of my suggestion is whether the Government is considering at the same time this proposal, because the situation needs immediate intervention. Part (b) of my question is this. Because of lack of water flow the Calcutta port is becoming stagnant and siltation is on the rise. Therefore, pending our agreement with Bangladesh and pending the construction of a connecting canal, will the Government consider taking steps for immediate and rapid de-siltation of the port of Calcutta so that it can be saved from the present position? All the three points are inter-linked.. The Government is taking a tough line. It is good. But at the same time, alternatives must be explored. If the alternatives are not explored

and if the negotiating time is very much prolonged, whatever tough line the Government may take, nothing will be done to the Calcutta port and in the whole process the economy—I am not speaking of Bengal—the economy of that region of the country will be seriously in ruins. The Government should consider it. I want a categorical assurance on these will the Government seriously take three points:

SHRI B. SHANKARANAND: The desiltation of the Calcutta Port has nothing to do with the main question. The question is about augmentation of water at Farakka. The hon. Member suggests that we should make some efforts to have the link canal right from Brahmaputra to Ganga through the Indian terirtory. I have already answered this question in Parts (c) and (d) of my main answer.

SHRI GURUDAS DAS GUPTA: The question is about the desiltation of Calcutta Port. The Prime Minister is here. It is a very important thing. You have to decide whether desiltation should be done pending the agreement with Bangladesh and what steps you have to take for desiltation. Otherwise, the Calcutta Port is totally ruined. I would request the hon. Prime Minister to kindly throw some light on it because desiltation is the most important step. Otherwise Calcutta Port cannot be saved.

(Interruptions)

SHRI B. SHANKARANAND: Sir, the hon. Member is more agitated on the question of desiltation of Hooghly at the Calcutta Port. Sir, the Ganga Action Plan and the other matters connected with it....

SHRI GURUDAS DAS GUPTA: What the Minister is talking is different. The Ganga Action Plan is different. It has nothing to do with desiltation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please hear him first.

SHRI GURUDAS DAS GUPTA: The Minister should understand my question. I am talking about desiltation, i.e. dredging of Ganga and particularly at the Calcutta Port so that it becomes more navigable.

SHRI B. SHANKARANAND: Desiltation does not form part of the talks between Bangladesh and India.

SHRI GURUDAS DAS GUPTA: Sir, the Calcutta Port is in ruins. It is not a question of Bangladesh.

SHRI CHITTA BASU: It is a question of the survival of Calcutta Port. Desiltation of the river Hooghly has nothing to do with the agreement. It needs energetic action on the part of the Government of India. I demand a statement from the Minister about it. Otherwise, Calcutta Port cannot be saved. You may take a long period of time to have tough negotiations with Bangladesh. But how is the Calcutta Port going to be saved? That is the point.

SHRI GURUDAS DAS GUPTA: Desiltation means dredging. Desiltation means removal of silt.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Dredging has been thought of. But it is so costly. They are thinking of alternative methods.

SHRI B. SHANKARANAND: I am not disagreeing with all that the hon. Member is saying. It is a suggestion for action.

SHRI DIPEN GHOSH: He should see whether he can take to dredging which will ensure greater flow of water along the canal which will ultimately save Calcutta Port also. Here comes the question of Indo-Bangladesh Pact. One of the factors is to make more flow available down the Ganges up to the level of its meeting point with the Bay of Bengal and it

depends upon the Bangladesh Government agreeing to take steps so that more water could be flowed down. We are glad that the Prime Minister has declared that the Government has taken a position so that Bangladesh agrees to it. He said that if it does not agree some tough decision has to be taken. Pending the action being taken by the Union Government to force Bangladesh to take steps so that more water could flow down the Ganges, what intermediary steps the Union Government proposes to take to facilitate a greater flow of water of whatever we have got, coming down from the Upper Ganga down to the Calcutta level? One of the proposals is desiltation. There are certain other proposals also. But the Minister of Irrigation can share with us what other steps they have got to allow a greater flow of water along the Ganges down to Calcutta Port.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It is a suggestion. They will note it. Some dredging is always going on there. (*Interruptions*)

SHRI GURUDAS DAS GUPTA: It is not going on. I make a statement that nothing is being done for desiltation at Calcutta Port despite our repeated requests to the Government.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Some dredgers were purchased and they were working there.

SHRI DIPEN GHOSH: It is dredging by the Calcutta Port Authorities. Sir, this dredging is a very costly affair. The Calcutta Port Authorities are asked to dredge for navigability purposes so that bigger ships could come to the Calcutta port. And this is beyond the financial capacity of the Calcutta Port Authority also. So, an over-all decision has to be taken by the Union Government.

SHRI GURUDAS DAS GUPTA: There was a definite proposal for dredging, and it was not done by the Union Government.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Question No. 122.

Travel concessions for ex-servicemen

*122. SHRI SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is a demand for providing travel concessions to ex-servicemen who are recipients of bravery awards; and

(b) if so, whether the Ministry of Defence have taken up the matter with the Ministry of Railways?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE PRODUCTION AND SUPPLIES IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (SHRI CHINTAMANI PANIGRAHI): (a) Yes Sir.

(b) The matter regarding grant of facility of free travel by rail to gallantry award winners was taken up with the Ministry of Railways. The Railways have indicated that it would not be possible for them to enhance the scope of existing concessions, due to financial constraints.

SHRI SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY: Sir, yesterday you asked us to be kind to the Congressmen and not to call them incompetent. So, I will say judging by this reply that this shows minimum competence. Sir, the question is about ex-Servicemen. They were prepared to risk their life for the country. And they come out, they retire at a very young age. We politicians never retire. But they have to retire at a very young age. And the minimum thing that could be given to them is the facility of travel. And how can the Railways take the stand that financial constraints are there? There is a Government. The Railways is not a law unto itself. There is no Cabinet Minister here. I do not know whether he is still there because everything changes very fast here. But the Minister of State is here. With this huge Defence